



**GOSSIP GIRL ▶**

**CW, Wed., 9 p.m.**

They drink, they get high, they were top fashion designers and, well, they ruffle bedsheets with abandon.

"Desperate Housewives"?

No, "Gossip Girl," the new young-adult drama from the folks at the CW. Based on a teen book series of the same name, the show follows a group of attractive, out-for-trouble prep-school teens from Manhattan's Upper East Side. And, yes, they wander Central Park smoking pot and get served martinis in hot spots.

The show is backed by Josh Schwartz, the guy who made a group of good-looking people from Orange County, Calif., all the rave on Fox's "The O.C."

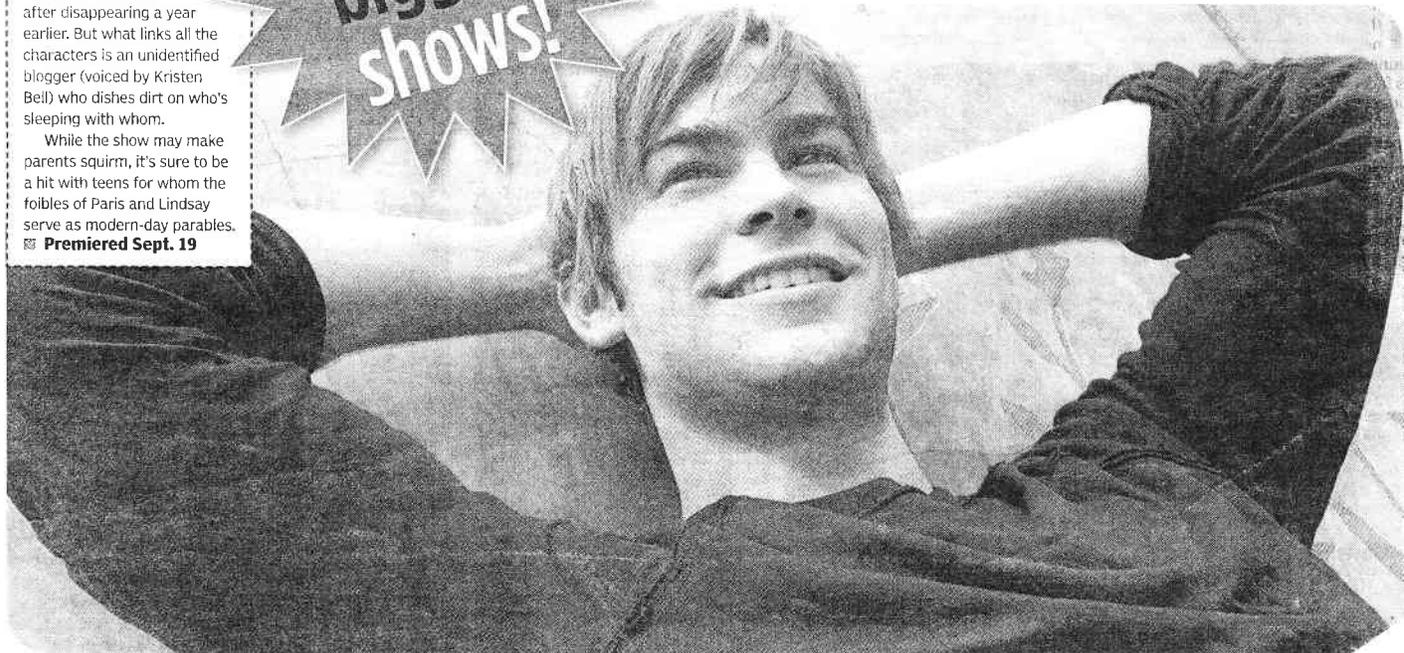
"Gossip Girl" centers on beauty Serena (Blake Lively, above front, with, from l: Penn Badgley, Ed Westwick, Chace Crawford, Taylor Momsen and Leighton Meester), who suddenly returns to New York after disappearing a year earlier. But what links all the characters is an unidentified blogger (voiced by Kristen Bell) who dishes dirt on who's sleeping with whom.

While the show may make parents squirm, it's sure to be a hit with teens for whom the foibles of Paris and Lindsay serve as modern-day parables.

**Premiered Sept. 19**

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**TALK OF THE**



SUSAN WATTS/DAILY NEWS

# TOWN

## Chace Crawford drives a love triangle on 'Gossip Girl' BY MICHAEL GILTZ

"I love New York," says actor Chace Crawford, one of the leads of "Gossip Girl," the new CW drama that debuted Wednesday. And why shouldn't he? His face is on billboards all over town alongside the rest of the sexy cast in this soap set in the exclusive world of upper East Side children of privilege.

He plays Nate Archibald, a latch-key teen with platinum credit cards but who drowns his sorrow in Champagne, pot and limo rides to hot spots. As Crawford jokes, "The research for this show was rough."

The 22-year-old admits he hung out at certain upscale nightspots a little bit but, mostly, he says, he showed a rough cut of the pilot to the kinds of kids it portrays, and then asked them, "Is this even remotely real? And they said, 'Yes, it is.'"

Crawford's character is at the center of the show's main triangle, a tug-of-war between onetime BFF's Blair Waldorf (Leighton Meester) and the mysteriously disappeared and just-returned Serena van der Woodsen (Blake Lively). Nate has been dating Blair since forever, but he slept with Serena right before she ran away and now, maybe, he just wants to be friends with both of them. Meanwhile, he's all *totally para* about

college and the feeling that maybe it isn't so good to have everything handed to you on a silver platter.

It's like "Sex and the City" without the warmth, since all the kids in this Manhattan high school are essentially on their own in a cutthroat world.

"Nate is definitely conflicted," says Crawford. "So now I'm working hard on finding a lot of different ways to play conflicted."

He's certainly not conflicted about moving to New York City after a childhood living in Plano, Tex. His mom helped him move into an apartment in Chelsea he shares with fellow cast member Ed Westwick (who plays supercad Chuck Bass), and Crawford gets to explore the city he fell in love with via the movies.

But despite the high drama of "Gossip Girl," don't wait for scandalous stories about Crawford; he laughs off the leap to becoming a model during high school. "I just wanted to make some money," he says, laughing some more when he's told his character is described in the "Gossip Girl" book as "one of those boys you look at and, while you're

looking at them, you know they're thinking, 'That girl can't take her eyes off me because I'm so hot.'"

After modeling, Crawford went to college, but soon found himself torn between his studies and his desire to act. He felt he wasn't giving either path a real chance, so his dad counseled him to quit school and focus full time on a career. That led to 2006's "The Covenant" (called "A B-movie 'Charmed' but with guys"), which opened at No. 1 at the box office.

Now he's soaking up New York and, as an avid photographer, documenting both the streets and his "Gossip Girl" co-stars as the show continues shooting locally. Fans of the source

books expect Crawford's character to move on from the love triangle and fall for Jenny (Taylor Momsen).

"That could be awkward," Crawford tips, "since the actress they cast in that role is *really* 14 years old!" He admits there may be sparks between those two characters, but says the show isn't wedded either to the timeline of the books or their plot twists. As he says, "I think Nate's going to be conflicted for quite awhile." ♦

The research for this show was rough! he jokes.